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Article: Divorces peak in January

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by Karin Cox-Putker, family lawyer and mediator specialising in divorce

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Why is it that more people start divorce proceedings in early January than at any other time of the year? Karin Cox-Putker, family lawyer and mediator at Phillips Solicitors specialising in divorce, says: 'Christmas stress is partly to blame, but my professional experience shows that the extra time spent together, often with extended family, can be the final straw that rocks a relationship already in dire difficulty. The New Year brings in a time when couples reassess what they really want and when the children have gone back to school in the first full week of business, couples start proceedings.'

Karin's experience is backed up by an independent research report 'Marriage and Divorce in 2007 Britain' published this week. The survey interviewed more than 2,000 people and found that rates of divorce proceedings in early January can be 50% higher than at any other time of the year. The report also takes an in-depth look at modern love – the social, economic, sexual and psychological ups and downs that make and break Britain's relationships

Relate, the largest supplier of relationship support in the UK, also confirms that the number of calls its centres receive over the festive period goes up by 50%.

So what are the main reasons why couples want to divorce?

The survey shows that the single biggest factor cited in relationship breakdown is 'lack of sex' and it also confirms that having an affair is a common problem leading to the breakdown of a marriage. Falling out of love is the second most popular reason why one in five (22%) marriages end today, and this is a more common reason for women (22%) rather than men (18%). Other key problems mentioned in the report include financial disagreements, debt, alcohol or drug abuse and careers or hobbies taking priority. Often damage to the relationship goes back over many years.

Commenting on the findings, Karin Cox-Putker, family lawyer at Phillips Solicitors, says: "These findings confirm our experience of helping couples to divorce, but what a sad indication of the state of the British institution of marriage. We see other emotional impacts that warring partners can have on the innocent bystanders, the children. A recent study warned that

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millions of school children are struggling in the classroom because of the spiralling divorce rate and the rise in the number of cohabiting couples who separate.'

How to stay sane

Going through separation or divorce can play havoc with your life, but keeping your affairs out of court can significantly reduce the stress, the acrimony and the costs. There are alternative ways of coming to an amicable agreement such as mediation which can help you avoid the painful win-lose situation and your mediator will help you reach a settlement that you both agree on. There is also collaborative law which is a new approach built upon mutual problem solving, where both parties and their lawyers pledge to work together to negotiate an agreement without going through a costly court case. Special four-way, face-to-face meetings mean proceedings are open at all times and a team of experts such as mediators and counsellors can also be called in.

You can also find help from an array of books, organisations and counselling services like Relate, who support partners as well as children. If you are parents, tell them together about what is going to happen. Reassure them that you can still be mum and dad even though you are not together as a couple any longer. Sort out your finances as soon as possible and avoid damaging debt problems. We can't wave a magic wand, but call one of our family team on 01256 460830 and we'll help you stay sane and cope more easily with the pain of family break-up.

Other findings:

- Sex, infidelity, falling out of love and abuse are the primary reason for divorce in Britain
- One in five women cite a serious incident of abuse as the reason for relationship breakdown
- One in three men currently bored with their wife and marriage
- Average length of marriage before it hits the rocks is seven years, three months
- Worst example of divorce is Mills-McCartney and best is Fergie and Prince Andrew

In the South East (Basingstoke), extramarital affairs are the main reason for divorce – 26% cited an affair whilst 22% said the defining moment was realising that they were not in love anymore (22%). Worryingly South East couples were more likely to find out about the affair by finding evidence of it (44%) instead of being told face to face (26%). More respondents in the South East cited commuting as a key problem in their marriage than anywhere else.

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